

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)
Transportation SubTeam
Meeting Minutes
October 9, 2020
Webinar

Attendees:

Meredith Budd
Katasha Cornwell
Amber Crooks, Chair
Elizabeth Fleming, Core Team Liaison
Gwen Pipkin
Don Scott
Brent Setchell
Daniel Smith
John Wrublik

Kristin Caruso
Niki Cribbs
Chris Dailey
William Freund
Nicole Monies
Bob Mrykalo
Denise Rach
Ben Shepherd
Jonathan Turner

- Agenda and Introductions
 - Members of the public who would like to receive regular notice of the draft agenda and call in info, please email Amber at amberc@conservancy.org to be included on the informal email list.
 - No changes to the proposed agenda.
- Communications
 - FWS Staff Liaison update. David Shindle not in attendance, but Amber mentioned that he had stated that the I-4 report and 2020 Hot Spot report were provided to the Core Team and USFWS; these reports are considered final. David will also let us know when the USFWS has sent the Hot Spots report to the recipient list. Amber also mentioned that the Subteam has received acknowledgement and appreciation from USFWS State Supervisor Larry Williams for our work on those efforts.
 - Core Team Liaison update: Elizabeth Fleming mentioned that there are currently vacancies on the Core Team which has been hiatus. Elizabeth will follow up with the Core Team about how the I-4 report will be utilized.
- Sharing of Information
 - US41 Hot Spot spot near SW Protection Feature

- Amber stated that she believes the conveyance features are being permitted separately in the future and could be another opportunity to add crossing structures. Meredith mentioned that the Picayune Strand monitoring and assessment group was formed. There was a public meeting scheduled for October 21, 2020. There is also a water quality group that is meeting as well.
- SR29
 - SR29 I-75 to Oil Well Road. Elizabeth stated that at the October 1, 2020 EAG meeting there was representation from many organizations and agencies. She mentioned that MCORES may become a funding source and may absorb the project if it goes forward. There is a funding shortage and MCORES may be a source. Participants shared info regarding the need for hydrological and habitat restoration, as well as habitat connectivity along this corridor. The schedule is in flux. A status of the other SR29 segments will be provided to the EAG at their next meeting.
 - SR29 from Oil Well Road to SR82 – the PD&E study for this segment is ongoing.
 - SR29 from SR82 to Cowboy Way – the PD&E for this section has been withdrawn. 3 wildlife crossings were planned within this section.
- SR82
 - The last segment of SR82 with 2 planned bridge replacements with wildlife crossing features is funded for construction in FY 2024 (July 2023).
 - Don stated that there is a major funding shortfall on roadways projects due to the COVID emergency, \$1.5 billion over 5 years statewide.
- LRTP Long Range Transportation Plans
 - Don updated that Charlotte MPO adopted LRTP this week. Collier MPO is having a public meeting on the cost feasible list on October 14, 2020. The Lee MPO board is meeting next Friday. Heartland LRTP is not due until March.
 - Amber mentioned that the proposed Interchange at Everglades and I-75 Alligator Alley is still on the cost feasible list for Collier County. Amber inquired if the Subteam would like to have LRTP as a more substantial future agenda item.
- Martin County 710
 - FDOT and District went out for site visit. Looking at funding to install fencing at existing crossing, which is an 8x6 box culvert with shelf. The structure was built for aquatic species, not designed for large mammals. It is likely dry about 10 months of the year. Because the structure is in a pretty wet area, Dan had suggested shorter fencing to make sure it didn't disallow panthers crossing elsewhere if it didn't utilize the structure.
- FWF Wildlife Crossing Manual
 - Another meeting planned for early November, scheduled to be completed next summer 2021.
- Managed Lane studies

- No update. Conservancy of Southwest Florida has submitted letters regarding the I-4 Managed Lanes study and the I-75 Managed Lane study to FDOT.
 - INVEST bill
 - Was a part of the large stimulus package. Not much happening on that at the moment.
 - Eastern Collier Habitat Conservation Plan
 - Amber stated that USFWS staff did not have a date certain for when the final Environmental Impact Statement or associated decisions would be publicly available.
- Urban Hot Spots Discussion
 - Working group of Amber, Brent, Dan, and Meredith met to discuss potential means to mitigate roadkill hot spots that are in high-traffic, urban, or otherwise difficult locations where building a traditional crossing structure is less practical. Went over minutes from the October 1, 2020 call. Minutes will be posted on the Subteam's webpage.
 - There was discussion of clearing vegetation at corner of Rivers Road to improve visibility at the land bridges these cats are using to cross Immokalee Road.
 - Regarding the Golden Gate Estates area hot spots, Don says that it would be a rough sale to the county and public to put in roundabouts, particularly multi-lane ones. Don will inquire and get feedback.
 - William asked about the use of RADS. Dan says that RADS not typically used on high traffic roads, and the general perception is that they would not work very effectively there as there is a lot of visual obstructions on the shoulders and in the median. There is also an increased risk of theft. RADS is better for places with limited narrow widths.
 - As discussed, Amber will type up the notes into an informal report to provide to the Core Team and US Fish and Wildlife Service (first routing through the Subteam for feedback and edits) to obtain guidance on next steps. These ideas could also be added into future hot spot report updates.
- RADS Update
 - William of fStop Foundation is monitoring on US41 and has documented several species of wildlife (deer, bear, coyote). Dan recorded deer and panther in his studies of this area.
 - Brent went over a few alternatives to improve the existing RADS system. Some of the alternatives are reflected in Dan's previous report (i.e. narrowing the crossing location and providing a crosswalk-type system).
 - Revisions would include fencing and a targeted RADS, respacing of sensors only up to 150 feet distance between. They would be able to use the equipment that they have. The revisions would potentially also include a new land bridge.
 - Potentially eliminating RADS on the north side due to difficulty in maintaining with the presence of the guardrail and canal.
 - Next step is to figure out costs for options, end of calendar year would start to make decision and move into design phase.

- Dan says that fencing was objected to in the past regarding crossing that was previously pursued. Fencing is needed for the crosswalk design. Fencing could be a stumbling block. Limited ROW on the north side is a problem with the sensors.
- Dan mentioned that in the location of new land bridge #3 it does dry out and panthers do seasonally cross at that location.
- Elizabeth stated that she would like continued discussion of this matter.
- Presentation by Dr. Tom Hctor
 - Tom went over the Statewide Greenways Initiative since 1990.
 - 2011-2016 update was the last one.
 - Technical Advisory Group included Dan, as well as David Shindle.
 - The new changes are to incorporate climate change.
 - The modeling will identify areas of ecological significance, select ecological hubs, delineate landscape linkages.
 - Data layers include panther habitat zones such as primary, secondary, and dispersal, as well as the important panther habitat identified by the University of Tennessee.
 - Also included layers like landscape species habitat (crested caracara, sandhill crane, black bear, etc.).
 - Looking at connectivity (riparian, coastal to inland, xeric, Florida panther/black bear, etc).
 - Panther 'hubs' established and may be revised in future updates (see study entitled Multi Faceted Approach to Corridor planning for the Florida Black Bear and Florida panther 2017 by Spontak and Hctor, Journal of Conservation planning).
 - Limitations of the Maxent habitat model is that it is occurrence-based, so it may be less reliable if used for North Florida. Ocala and north mapping is focused on black bear, and southern half of state is panther based.
 - Utilizing the Circuitscape system.
 - Also analyzed corridors and linkages from Florida into states to the north.
 - The "Florida Wildlife Corridor" is P1 and P2 lands. A TAG is looking at adding P3 to the wildlife corridor.
 - Hctor provides partners with list of priorities for closing linkages.
 - Newest update should be done by fall 2021.
 - LCDs intended to be the highest level of regional planning.
 - Using Kautz 1994 with updated CLC data, Frakes 2015 (smoothed), Kautz 2006 zones, CLIP 4.0 landscape integrity, and FEGN layer.
 - Identifying for NFWF unserved ranches that have high conservation value.
 - FL 2070 growth projection didn't include sea level rise and is being updated.
 - Potential project: Dr. Maru Iezzi study that would use graph theory and other current connectivity modeling techniques to identify strategic panther connectivity priorities at the parcel level.
 - Q red corridors that were displayed in a map. What is the width? A 2-4 miles in width. Corridors within hubs are wide.

- Q where to find these resources? A the shapefiles are available. FEGN layer is FGDL or CLIP FNAI website; sublayers connectivity model through Hctor; LDC info via Kevin Godsea; the remainder is in process so it is only draft.
- Q Brent asked why Tom's modeling was not focused on connecting the west side sources and destinations.
- Least cost pathways
 - Dan presented the current versions of the pathways.
 - Report writing: Dan would like to separate the report into subsection, i.e. I-4, Lake Wales ridge, etc. Dan will provide a template of the format.
 - Meredith, Amber, and Elizabeth are available to assist with the drafting.
 - Would like to include information in the tables where the closest wildlife structures are located to these pathways.
- MCORES
 - Final task force meetings is week of Oct 19, 2020. Reports out for public review until Oct 14. Collier County Board of County Commissioners passed a statement of support for MCORES. It was mentioned that the Subteam's hotspots and I-4 reports could be utilized for the process, as well as the Dr. Hctor, and LCP info once it is available.
- Public comment – none.
- Next Subteam meeting
 - Originally scheduled for Jan 20, 2021, but then rescheduled for Jan 27, 2021.
 - Future agendas: We were not able to get to the agenda item to discuss potential errors in the hotspots report, so it should be included in the next meeting's agenda.